Ministry of Education, Ontario
Historical Collection

Circular H.S. 4C
4000 November, 1946 (2674)

OHS2
373.1262
059DE1M-E

ONTARIO

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MEMORANDUM

To Principals of Collegiate Institutes, Vocational, High and Continuation Schools

Re Departmental Examinations in Upper School English

1. THE ENGLISH LITERATURE EXAMINATION OF 1946

The following information in regard to the work of the candidates at the Upper School examination of 1946 in English Literature is presented in the hope that it may prove helpful to teachers of English in the secondary schools. It is to be understood that the allotment of marks to the several parts of the course and the comments upon the candidates' answers apply only to this Examination and that neither the scale of valuations nor the form of questions will necessarily be duplicated in future examinations in the subject.

The answer papers were evaluated on the basis of 100 marks, which were divided as follows: Shakespeare—24; Longer Poems—24; Shorter Poems—14; *The Vicar of Wakefield*—12; Short Stories and Essays—10; Sight Poetry—16.

I. Form of Answers

Considerable improvement was noticed this year in clarity of expression. Topic sentences were almost universally used. It is suggested, however, that candidates should be reminded that merely *stating* a point does not entitle them to full marks. The point should be *made* and *developed* by means of explanation, supported by example or illustration. In the first question, for example, a candidate states that Macbeth and Banquo are quite differently affected by their meeting with the weird

sisters on the heath (1 mark for statement of the point). Macbeth seems to be rapt at what he hears and, when part of the prophecy is fulfilled in his being created Thane of Cawdor, he is stirred to aim at becoming King (3 marks for making and developing the point). Banquo, on the other hand, is much less disturbed by the apparition and is surprised when Macbeth is hailed as Thane of Cawdor. He is sure the witches are spirits of evil and will take no steps to make their prophecies come true (3 marks for making the point and developing the contrast).

It should be noted, too, that to get full marks on the whole first question the candidate must make it clear that the two characters he is contrasting are "in somewhat similar circumstances." To take another obvious example, contrast the behaviour of Macbeth and Banquo when Ross, later in the same scene, brings news to Macbeth that Duncan has made him Thane of Cawdor. Or, again, contrast the behaviour of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth when the murder of Duncan is announced.

II. Errors in Spelling

In a survey made by the Committee over a period of ten days it was found that practically 5% of the failures were due to faulty spelling. Fewer errors this year, however, were of the crude or careless type, although the old favourites—ressembles, wierd, soliloquys, beleive, recieve, speach, etc.—persisted.

III. Faulty Usage

Such serious mistakes as run-on-sentences, lack of agreement between subject and predicate, persistent lack of punctuation, the "is-when" type of definition, formation of nouns by adding—ness (e.g. ambitiousness) resulted in a maximum penalty of six marks.

Many examples of awkward phrasing were found, which, though not penalized, prevented the candidate from receiving full marks, e.g., Shakespeare has Prince Hal orate the following soliloquy; A dramatic soliloquy is rendered; Humour is portrayed; Then he illustrates how a good happy man . . . . .; The author gives us this man . . . . ., etc.

IV. Notes on the Answers

Question 2:

Through failure to read the question carefully candidates frequently lost marks by giving only one example of each of the terms or by giving examples selected from *two* different

plays. In many cases, too, time was lost by candidates who defined and illustrated all four of the terms. Moreover, the definitions in many cases were vague and unsatisfactory.

The following definitions served as a guide to examiners and may be of interest to the teachers:

> Wit is the sudden and ingenious association of words or ideas in such a way as to excite surprise and amusement. It appeals to the mind, not to the feelings.
>
> Humour is a quality of action, speech, or writing which excites amusement. It appeals more to the feelings than to the mind.

N.B.—An ingenious contrast of the two terms by means of a table is given in Fowler's *Modern English Usage*. Any definition which showed clearly that the candidate understood the term as used in drama was accepted. The following are examples of such answers:

> "Wit" in Hamlet . . . is that certain sharpness of speech, whether it be bitter sarcasm or just playful teasing, which characterises Hamlet especially, throughout the play. It is none of Polonius's heavy buffoonery, but rather Hamlet's quick turns of speech in talking to the "tedious old fool," as he rather unjustly calls him. Hamlet takes particular advantage of his pretence of madness, in which Polonius heartily believes—making him agree, for instance, that a cloud takes on various shapes, and, in an earlier scene, calling him a "fishmonger," with bitter reference to Polonius' treatment of Ophelia. ("Recorder" also used as an example) . . . . In his dealings with the gravediggers and with the arrogant buffoon, Osric, Hamlet shows the playful, but still razor-keen wit which helps to make his character more lovable and believable."

Dramatic irony is that irony of circumstance or plot where the speaker is unaware of any ironical intent, but where a speech as later revealed, or as known to the audience has an unexpected meaning.

When Duncan approaches Macbeth's castle he says, "This castle hath a pleasant seat: Nimbly and sweetly . . . . . unto our gentle senses." This, of the place where, at that very time, his cold-blooded murder is being planned.

Before Macbeth has Banquo killed, he invites him to a banquet. He says, "Fail not our Feast." Banquo answers, "My Lord, I will not." And he doesn't. Banquo's ghost takes his place at the banquet table.

Question 3:

Many long rambling answers to this question were practically worthless. For the following short concise answers one candidate received full marks:

(a) This passage from "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" is the climax of the poem. Up to this point in the poem, the moving spirit has been a demon force; now, when the Mariner has regained the power to pray and a love for all living things, the visible sign of his punishment, the Albatross, falls from him, and an angelic force takes charge.

(b) In these words Michael sums up his strong love of property—landed property. This fear of the loss of his land is the motive for his sending his only son, Luke, away to the city, where Luke falls into disgrace.

Question 4:

Note that in this question the candidate may agree or disagree with the statement quoted. Both answers given below, presented by two different candidates, received full marks:

The moral of "The Ancient Mariner" is that one must love and protect all things that God has created. I am inclined to agree with Coleridge's objection. What has been a perfectly delightful, fanciful, and romantic tale degenerates, through moralizing in the last few stanzas, into a trite lesson on conduct. Had the poem been left as a magnificent imitation, in improved style, of the ancient ballads, which are for the most part without moral conclusions, the result would have been excellent. The story must obviously be taken "cum grano salis," and yet we are expected to draw a positive moral conclusion from it.

or

Without the moral the poem would have become a mere sailor's legend, and had no place in philosophic English. With the moral it has in no wise lost anything. The mariner acts spontaneously. He does not worry about the moral or the finer nuances of the situation when he blesses the creatures unaware, but the incident is driven home to the reader as we watch this love become his salvation. It is the moral which gives the poem much of its reality; for we see the mariner torn between good and evil, love and hate, for the creatures of the earth, and are gripped by the reality of this struggle. We forget the supernatural; we would not if there were no moral. The tale would degenerate in truth into an Arabian

Night's Tale without it. It is well that someone chose to give English a poem with that moral enclosed in such a gripping story. Coleridge has not over-emphasized the moral. It appears only in a few odd lines, and in the last section. I feel he is being overly critical of his own work.

(b) This question proved difficult to many candidates. The answer given below was simple but satisfactory:

> Milton's full and vivid description of Il Penseroso as "sober, steadfast, and demure," clothed in black and with downcast eyes and "rapt soul" is in contrast to the absence of description of Mirth's appearance. In telling of Il Penseroso's ideal day, Milton describes the melancholy man as spending his time alone, reading tragedies and Plato's philosophy and dozing in "twilight groves." This life of a recluse is more in keeping with Milton's own life than is the social peasant life of L'Allegro. Therefore from Milton's fuller description and more subjective treatment of Il Penseroso, we see that he prefers Melancholy to Mirth.

Question 7:

Candidates were expected to refer in some detail to at least two passages in the essay that are entertaining as well as improving or informative. Many candidates either failed to show any definite knowledge of the essay or, in trying to avoid a mere summary, made only a few vague and general statements which might have applied to any essay of this type. Often there was very little evidence that the student had even read *On Saying "Please."* Such an ineffective answer is given below:

> Gardiner picks a subject which is simple, interesting, has a moral and which applies to everyone. Gardiner entertains his reader by his keen sense of humour, his numerous examples, illustrations, and finally a story. His title also attracts the reader. His style and word magic which he possesses makes his essay easier to read. He is clear, definite, concise, delivers his point, and sums up his essay in the last paragraph. He also observes the rules of coherence and unity.

Question 8:

The majority of candidates did well on this question though many failed to grasp 8 (b), Dunsany's conception that the artist is one gifted with insight and that his task is to catch and record for those of us who are not artists the visions of loveliness that come to him.

A portion of an answer by a candidate who appreciated the role of an artist follows below:

Each of the poet's examples of beautiful or striking scenes that he has observed is etched clearly in a line or two with pleasingly apt phrases. His description of willows "standing like witches haunting a stream" is a fanciful but accurate picture; for who has not seen the willow swooping over a stream with black branches bending like skinny arms with snatching fingers as if watching over a seething brew in the waters, or guarding them from intruders. It is the willow, not on a sunny day in spring, to be sure, but on a dark and clammy night when the wind-tossed branches seem alive. I could write more, but all my words could not bring as vivid a picture as the poet's two simple but most striking lines.

2. THE ENGLISH COMPOSITION EXAMINATION OF 1946.

The following comments on the Upper School examination of 1946 in English Composition are made in the hope that they will prove useful to teachers of this subject. It should be understood, however, that the allotment of marks and the method of marking used in this examination will not necessarily apply in the future, except that, according to the Courses of Study (Circular H. S. IB, May 1946), 60 marks are prescribed for the essay part of the paper.

I. The Essay

Since the standards set for the marking of the essay were the same as those for the 1945 examination, it is considered unnecessary to repeat the information given last year in the Memorandum re Departmental Examinations in Upper School English (H. S. Circular 4C, November, 1945) copies of which were sent to the principal of each secondary school. However, two observations might be made concerning the essay question:

1. Candidates were penalized for not writing on the assigned topics; e.g., *Duck hunting* instead of *The migration of birds; A picture of life on the farm* instead of *A rainy day on the farm* or *Farm life in winter.*

2. Candidates should be advised to use *ink* for all rough work as well as finished work. Examiners sometimes found it difficult to read rough work written in pencil.

Note: An essay which was given high grading is printed at the end of this circular.

II. The Appreciation

In order to obtain full marks for matter, a candidate must have discussed all the four points mentioned in the question. Nine marks were allowed for a good discussion of language

and descriptive detail, and six marks for sentence structure and paragraph structure. Full marks were not given for general statements without illustration nor for enumeration of points without critical comment.

Under language the candidate might have noted the concreteness, vividness, and occasional homeliness of the words, the suggestive power of the similes and metaphors, effective onomatopoeia, and alliterations.

Under descriptive detail he might have referred to the numerous suggestions of swift motion, details descriptive of sound and touch, local colour, atmospheric effects—"tops of trees lying all speckled and furry under the moonlight", physical and mental point of view—"his teeth chattering," "he wished that he were back in the lines again."

Under sentence structure he might have commented on the direct nature of the sentences, their suitability to the simplicity, directness, or swiftness of the narrative, and their suggestion of a child's way of thinking. He might also have pointed out the effective balancing of clauses, and the variety of sentence-types.

Under paragraph structure he might have pointed out that the author observes the law of unity by having each paragraph deal with a definite phase of the boy's ride (unity of thought) and that unity is further maintained by adherence to the boy's point of view (unity of impression) ; that coherence is obtained by indication of the sequence of events, by the use of parallel construction, and by the occasional use of connectives—"Sometimes." (1. 3) ; "Then" (1. 32) ; that emphasis is achieved by the striking beginning and ending of each paragraph, by the maintenance of suspense throughout, by repetition, and by contrast.

The candidate was given a mark for a good critical comment on the passage as a whole.

Some answers were made excessively long by the use of too many examples.

To obtain full marks for style, the candidate's appreciation had to possess coherence, smoothness, clarity, variety, and good diction. It was possible for a candidate to receive eight marks for a plain, straightforward style.

The following appreciation was awarded fourteen marks for matter and nine marks for style:

> The outstanding characteristic of Kipling's language is its simplicity. We find not unusual words, but words which the readers, many of them young, are entirely familiar with. But for all this the choice of words is

excellent. He seems always to have selected that word which describes the situation best. Such words as "furious" to describe the trumpeting, "rifts" to describe the opening among the trees, "speckled and furry" to describe the tops of the trees and "pistons" to describe the legs of the elephant, show Kipling's feeling for vividness and for exactness of sound and detail.

This passage contains dozens of examples of accurate observation. Even the smallest sounds such as the rustling of the wrinkled skin of the elephants' elbows, and the rattling of the quills of the porcupine, are recorded. The details chosen for description by the author, for example, the wild pepper vines, the blue-white mist and the bamboo, are those which add to the mysterious atmosphere of the jungle. The selection is a short one and yet Kipling has succeeded in conveying a complete situation, and in setting down a complete picture.

The majority of the sentences are rather long, and consist of a series of phrases joined together with commas and semi-colons. A good example of such a sentence is,

"The undergrowth on either side of him ripped with a noise like torn canvas, and the saplings that leaned away right and left with his shoulders sprang back again, and banged him on the flank, and great trails of creepers, all matted together, hung from his tusks as he threw his head from side to side and ploughed out his pathway."

The long sentences give a flowing effect to the description. In this way the chain of pictures which Little Toomai sees as he rides his elephant are shown to the reader in an uninterrupted stream.

Each of the four paragraphs deals with one phase of the trip. The first with the ascent to the top of the hill, the second with scene at the top of the hill, the third with the descent and the fourth with the crossing of the river at the bottom of the hill. It is a precise and orderly arrangement which presents a clear picture of the laps of the ride.

III and IV. Vocabulary Tests

The purpose of these questions was to test the candidate's ability to recognize, define, and use correctly words within the vocabulary range of a Grade XIII student.

In question three, one mark was awarded for each correct selection made; e.g., flair—power of discriminating—1 mark.

In question four, one mark was awarded for each word correctly defined. A synonym was considered acceptable in place of a definition. If, however, in attempting a complete sentence, the candidate made a "major error," no mark was

awarded. The candidate was not required to name the part of speech, but it was necessary for him to explain the word as the proper part of speech; e.g., "*ado*, noun, fuss," 1 mark; "*ado*, fuss," 1 mark.

To gain the mark for using the word correctly in a sentence, the candidate had to write a sentence in which the prescribed word was used idiomatically and in which the meaning of the word was unmistakably clear and accurate.

* * *

The following essay was awarded well over seventy-five per cent of the marks assigned to this part of the paper:

A RAINY DAY ON THE FARM

The hot glare of the sun had melted from the barn roof and now black clouds like huge, clumsy air-ships began to crowd across the sky. I quickly bundled my tools together and slung them into the waiting loft below. Mounting the roof again, I straddled the peak, one leg down the new shingles of the west side, the other down the old of the east, wishing to cry to the sky "A glorious rain, for having interrupted my grimy task of shingling."

The storm-god gathered his forces. His scouts, the lightning-bolts, searched the sky for unwary travellers. The pigeons appeared, sloping their wings, as they fell from the path of the storm into the sanctuary of the barn's loft.

The world grew dark and still. The great oak, in the garden seemed crouched, preparing for the blast of the wind, which even now was howling in its chains. Now, it seemed to me, that it was the barn that moved past rivetted clouds and I felt like a captain, driving my ship on into the storm. Then the first light drops bounced on the barn roof and I scrambled down into the loft.

Inside all was dark, warm, and protective. A pigeon cooed. The smell of the hay, sweet and yet somehow musty, lured me to the top of a huge pile of it, from which, through the barn door, I could view the storm, as it waged war against the resisting earth.

I lay there; the hay was warming and relaxing, while outside the storm gathered his forces for a fresh onset. The rain drummed its steady rhythm on the barn roof and cascaded in powerful streams through the eaves. The thunder groaned, while in the garden the oak flailed her arms at the passing wind for having interrupted her summer sleep.

But in the loft the air was fresh and warm; my bed was soft and soon I found a companion among the hay. The ever-changing form of sleep greeted me from the corners. His hands

changed the beat of the rain to a lullaby, his breath the air to heady waves of sleepiness. I must fight this sleep. The storm, the wind seemed to be drifting over me; the hay engulfed me in comfort. The creak of a board startled me. I laughed at sleep, gloating in the corner. I knew I could keep awake if only I tried hard, very hard, hard. . . . . .

When I awoke, the storm had passed and sunlight, like a huge bright insect, crawled on the loft's floor. The pigeons had left me and were climbing into the sun. I stood at the door of the loft, breathing in the crisp, pure air and watching the sun's sparkle reflecting in the countless little streams which crisscrossed the smiling fields. In the garden, the flowers shook their heads in an attempt to rid themselves of the loathsome water. The shadow of the great oak, now standing quietly, sprawled across the moist earth and dribbled away among the reeds of the water's edge.

The roof was hot and steaming as I climbed again to my perch. But the earth was refreshed and I was refreshed and my task of shingling, with the green earth about me bursting with freshness, no longer seemed like drudgery.

Issued by Authority of
The Minister of Education
Toronto, November 15th, 1946